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Minutes 03/26/2009

Arlington Historic District Commissions
 Whittemore Robbins House
 March 26, 2009

Commissioners Present: M. Penzenik, J. Worden, T. Smurzynski, M. Kramer, A. Frisch, D. Levy, S. Makowka
 (Arrived at 9pm)

Commissioners

Not Present: M. Hope Berkowitz, M. Potter, B. Cohen,

J. Worden presiding until Chairman Makowka arrived at 9:00pm

Appointment of alternate commissioners – Central Street – T. Smurzynski, D. Levy ; Mt Gilboa/Crescent Hill; T. Smurzynski, A. Frisch

February Minutes tabled until next month; T. Smurzynski moved acceptance of January minutes, M. Kramer seconded, approved unanimously

Old Business – Preservation Loan Program – no requests for information

Status of Projects by Monitors – No updates. Discussion about how to have projects sign off at completion.

Signs – missing District signs

New Business

a. Formal Hearing re: 21 Central Street (Dyer) re: installation of solar panels. Contractor Steve Kazzir, representing owner of house, GOGreen Industries is company looking to put solar panels on back quarter of main part of house.

Collector dimensions 8 x 6 feet, 2 collectors on roof. Looking to get 1 for each residence. Side of main roof faces Mass. Ave. Panels will be flush mounted about 4 – 4 inches elevated from roof. Evacuated tube placed in series to generate heat, flat plate collector looks like a skylite, tend to be twice size, disadvantage have a lot of glare. This is charcoal, all bronzed and no glare at all. Evacuated tube improves solar glare. Not a lot of refraction. 18 x 40' is actual roof. These will appear very muted, aesthetically very much with the tones of the shingles. Blended shingle has distorted volume to it, greys, taupes & charcoals so panels don't appear to be darker or lighter. No way for them to be done to perform properly unless installed this way. J. Worden asked about putting them near ridge, they can go lower, but don't want to get in to ice/water belt. Stay at least 6 feet away from gutter. Could take flat plate collector, but if they go into Velux system they have to double the aperture area. These are smaller on roof. These are connected to roof – brackets similar to what roofers use, 10 inches in length goes up under roofing system, screwed into center of rafter. Probably 24 – 28 inches on center. Energy smackdown looking to see who can reduce carbon footprint. M. Penzenik said nothing subtle about them, asked applicant for permission to continue hearing until next month. Show actual things to scale on building and then would maybe be more willing to approve. Installed 1 today on Oldham Road, 79 Westmoreland Ave. is offset from house tilted. A. Frisch moved extension until April's meeting. Applicant will supply list of addresses and a photoshop markup showing before and after. Continued until 4/23.

b. Informal Hearing re: 235 Pleasant Street – Heather Hewitt and Nasir (owners) present to ask questions about a project. Looking in to 3 major areas of updates – gutters, windows and security fencing. Ornamental functional handrailings on front of house. Would they be ok to change wood gutters? What about replacement windows?

Original windows would want preserved if possible. Encourage restoration instead of replacement. Security fencing, driveway gate – along wall. Steep drop off over wall, want character along front of house. Need appropriate to house. Thinking hand forged solid rod iron. Rod iron gate at driveway entrance. Large driveway that connects with house next door. Intrusiveness factor is a problem. Fence along side yard and back of house to keep pets enclosed.

c. Informal Hearing re: 26 Academy Street – C. Wright. Deck finished. Winter taught them how 100 or less square feet is a problem. No vestibule or mudroom so house was a mess. Proposing front mudroom and covered deck.

Would be in clear public view. Matter of necessity for livability. One bit of footprint to optimize use of house. L and built out loft is dining room coming into kitchen into open family room. M. Penzenik said proposal not acceptable at all in her mind. Very old part of house. Recollection 2 houses moved, loft added. L was original structure, probably one of oldest structures in Arlington. Had discussion about moving windows, etc. strong desire to preserve old structure.

Want an idea of how to be helpful. Part of importance to them is integrating into landscaping. Trying to create precedent of working with whole lot. Trying to create precedent where whole thing will be done in 5 year project.

Challenge – large obstructing sewer cleanout in front of dining windows, probably 10 feet from house. Bulkhead to basement is below family room. J. Worden said appreciates knowledge of what goes on inside, but the guidance from the Commissioners is of immediate negative reaction. Front elevation of house and this particular piece doesn't work.

Has to be another way to address function. M. Penzenik saying anything on front is objectionable, suggested applicant take look at other alternatives. Architect can come up with other options.

d. Continuation of Formal Hearing re: 187 Lowell Street (J&K Construction). S. Makowka started with summary.

Paraphrase – consensus of commission that there was potential for some sort of project that could meet approval of Commission. Feedback proposed design of addition on original house. Questions about size and some of design elements on lot 1 (b in drawings) as well of siting, whether can be moved on lot at all. Biggest concern design of house on lot 3 (c in drawings) Overall consensus was think about doing something else with addition on house, slight modifications for lot 1 and really think about smaller carriage house like building on lot 3. Applicant asked for more time to come back to Commissioners with changes. Atty. Dillon said attempt to reduce floor area/footprint, height, separation of buildings, design concept changes. R. Botterio talked about existing house first – recall previous addition commented looked like cape lopped on to back of building, talked about how to make different, best to look like it was always part of original house. Used same elements on house, pitch, height, dormers, etc., brought it down, but in plan same features, molding, look. In plan tapered, brought back and cut down short. It was offset and further back. No changes to existing house except addition on back now. Total square footage after addition is 2910. Adding on 400sf x 2 floors to original footprint. S. Makowka asked about specifications of materials – Tab 9. Materials to match existing materials. Same materials for each of the 3 properties. Same clapboards, roofing, dimensions. C. Wreitzel, 80 Westminster abutter, change is addition moved in to line with roof of main house and kickout dormers gone with smaller footprint, was 536, now 400. M. Penzenik spoke as member of audience. Proposing Anderson windows – cannot be vinyl on outside. Woodwrite is historical replication. Anderson windows have no subsill. Does 1 applied sill. On sash, again the other Anderson lines, the height of rails & styles, very skimpy – could provide samples. S. Makowka interjected a monitor would be responsible to be sure appropriate windows used. Lot to left (Lot 1, house B), original footprint shown, proposed footprint difference is original footprint 1936sf, reduced to 1640sf. Total of original sf was 3493sf, reduced to 3200sf. Reduced height 2 feet lower than proposed. Removed side porch, returned & wrapped into house. Side that faces Taylor house, narrowed cross gable by 10 feet, put in two matching dormers (shedlike), lopped off back somewhat. Put in narrow conservatory on rear. Gable shingled with clapboards below, now all clapboards. Front façade is same size but lowered by 3 feet. 2nd floor bumpout no longer there, goes straight across. One below on porch below. Same windows, clapboards, specifications as on Taylor house. Porch details & railing simpler compared to Taylor house. Proposed backbanding around windows as molding detail. S. Makowka asked about grading. Still Queen Anne style house, simpler though. 58' from front façade to rear corner, additional 8 feet on bumpout solarium. Same site as last proposal, house has not moved from front of street.

Elevation relative to Taylor house and physical separation of 2 structures. 8'4" below peak of Taylor House. Horizontal separation between house on left and Taylor House is 57' 4". Re: grading it was suggested that instead of doing what they originally thought for porch, when dig out foundation using soil to regrade so porch will not be so high from the ground. Didn't sink house – raised ground. S. Makowka asked if this creates a steeper slope. Need to see how terracing will work. Front façade 16'8" back from TH front porch. So it's an 11' setback with porch. J. Egan, 11 elder terrace, asked how much taller her house will be than the house on the left. Nick Svencer, 197 Lowell Street, commented a lot of work taking view from Lowell Street. Questions massing of house form Elder Terrace. Huge wall of house from Elder Terrace. S. Makowka noted that we have inclusion of houses on Elder Terrace, standing on Lowell walking along that property you can see it. We consider Elder Terrace views. J. Salocks, over size reduced by less than 10%, reduced footprint by 296sf, increased 2nd floor sf. C. Reitzel, 80 Westminster Ave. pointed out that Lowell Street view isn't only view of property. Real tightness from back, how can you deny Ivers' proposal to build additional property. 360 degree of property needs to be taken into consideration. M. Penzenik, resident commented deceptive – models show volumes highly articulated. Helps reduce apparent massing. Lessens impact of the appearance of being one long huge wall. Now discussion on lot 3 (building to right of Taylor House) – S. Makowka reiterated this structure significantly concerned about size, ornamentation, proximity to existing Taylor House.

Removed wing so it's less close to Taylor House (approx. 6 feet according to plans). Massing is what they've really been trying to work reducing. Reduced height on front by 3', added overhang. On side you have dormer pitch reduced. Length of house basically the same. More space on top, but lowered by putting dormers. 2 stories, front section of house 18" stepdown so front section wanted to look like barn or Queen Anne with stair. Wanted to look like own entity with Queen Anne style instead of barn style. SF new structure 2900sf, footprint of 1450. Issue with right hand house sentiment is nothing there – maybe could do something very small. Seems like that advice has been ignored and applicants have come back and taken house on modest diet, reduced a little bit, but still too massive, too close to TAYLOR HOUSE. Reluctantly in back corner could have been a barn, but this is nothing like that plan.

Cannot sit back any further than it is this big. Needs to be that big in order to go along with streetscape. Another house, not a carriage house, no longer subsidiary property tried to reduce massing, height. Make it look smaller from

street. Model is not correct. S. Makowka said house sited on lot, siting noted in many places. How does or does it not impinge on existing structures for today. Have taken consideration into preserving sweeping lawn, front of house. J. Salocks commented this doesn't measure up in any way enhancing the historic district. You're crowding TAYLOR HOUSE, not budging on it at all. You're really not listening to criticisms. S. Stafford, 203 Lowell Street, other point that neighbors trying to make, it's not just matter of preserving building or front lawn, the siting right now makes the house look grander than it is. The concept of taking 2 other houses, similar size from front, lining them up with same setback from street, makes house look like any other historic house in district. Will still look like a nice old house. Grandness of that house with both these houses is diminished. J. Egan, 11 Elder Terrace, you might say it might look ok from Lowell, but from Elder it's going to be this massive huge long house coming down, won't see Lowell Street any longer, or TAYLOR HOUSE. M. Dempsey, 123 Westminster, proposal nice, more likely to be in Lexington. Scaling revision pretty timid. Creates district of 3 houses in a district. Disappointed frankly with revisions. N. Svencer, 197 Lowell, thought same, final numbers disappointing. Shocked that changes so minimal, frankly ideas that overall size of house not changed – big houses. Openness not preserved. C. Reitzel echoed previous comments. Question for Commission – could you tell us impact lawsuit and settlements. Nothing to do with that – on questioning the only town official was John Maher, previous town counsel, who told the applicant to work in good faith with the HDC. Changes and uses of property and what's appropriate in district. D. Levy commented he studied these, significant changes to design for massing & architecture much more successful than before. At same time, as good as it got, he likes TAYLOR HOUSE changes, other 2 houses still has significant concerns. Lot 3 house can't see it working here in terms of size of it – thought Commission clear on size of structure and this falls way short. On lot 1 house architecturally significant improvements, but still so gargantuan he'd really have a hard time supporting it. A. Frisch likes what's done to architecture, problem ultimately how 9000 sf of house affects campus, impact on terrace. From Elder Terrace concerned about impact. In Byzantine rules of bylaws opportunities for denial with potential modifications that would result in approval. S. Makowka moved that the Mt. Gilboa/Crescent Hill Historic District Commission, having fully reviewed the application for a Certificate of Appropriateness before it, including supplemental materials, for the construction of two new structures and the enlargement of the existing structure, be denied, based on the Commission's findings that the project under consideration, if constructed according to the plans submitted would violate the general harmony and historical and architectural values of the site and the District for the following reasons:

1. The site as developed in 1884 has the existing structure situated in the middle of the lot at 187 (as that lot was delineated at the time that the Historic District was created.) There is no record evidence that any additional structure ever existed on this lot or that any was contemplated subsequent to the construction of the existing house. The information from historical maps and other information that suggest that the subject site is part of two house lots shown in the original subdivision plan do not support the addition of additional structures as proposed given the fact that there are presently four houses on the now divided parts of those two original lots. The fact of subdivision of other lots in the Mt. Gilboa District further highlight the need to preserve and protect the diversity and distinctiveness of the buildings and settings found in the District.
 2. The landscape and setting of the Taylor House are integral aspects of its historic and architectural importance of the site itself and which would be irrevocably altered and lost by the enlargement of the existing building and the construction of the two additional buildings proposed in the application.
 3. The proposed buildings, in combination, are out of scale with neighboring houses in size, massing, and footprint, and thus inappropriate. In addition, the massing and placement of the proposed house on Lot 3 – 2900 sf with a 1460 sf footprint, situated at a distance of only 22 feet from the existing structure – creates an inappropriate crowding effect that impinges inappropriately on the siting of the existing house and detracts significantly from the historical and architectural elements of the property as noted in numerous survey documents and the Final Report establishing the Historic District itself. Seconded by J. Worden for discussion, S. Makowka moved that the motion to deny be amended by adding there to the following: Notwithstanding the above determinations, pursuant to the provisions of MGL Chapter 40C, Section 10 "Additional powers, functions and duties of commission," subsection (a) the Mt Gilboa/Crescent Hill Historic District Commission finds that the following modifications to the application, if received by the Commission in written form within 14 days of receipt by the Applicant of this notice, would make the application acceptable to the Commission and cause a Certificate of Appropriateness to be issued:
1. The house on Lot 3 and the associated driveway shall not be constructed.

S. Makowka appreciates attempts to address requests for changes, modifications in style and siting minimize impact from street and make much more in harmony with district. Lot 1 house is large, but appreciate concerns & design to minimize impact. Much more room on left. Ability to put structure in while maintaining spacing, avoiding crowding.

Maintain front open space. By contrast, maintenance of large 2900sf house on lot 3 in relatively narrow lot, really impinges on Taylor House. Detracts from site and from house. Wanted to see carriage house style, didn't see it.

Proposal before us doesn't meet that criteria. Doesn't think nothing is answer to be built there - but what is proposed would not be allowed. A. Frisch said he doesn't have as much of problem with lot 3 as he does with impact of proposed lot 1 on elder terrace. Concerns could be somewhat remedied if it was smaller in back. Having trouble imagining that mass from Elder Terrace. M. Kramer said articulation completely changes massing, doesn't think it's going to stand up anywhere like it would have before. Doesn't have problem with massing. Thinks they work well in the district. T. Smurzynski – project smaller, house b on lot 1 does not have long horizontal planes that bothered him.

Efforts to make buildings less massive than before - this would warrant approval for him as a whole. J. Worden seconded amendment to motion. For voting on the Amendment to denial to provide for approval with removal of the

third house on Lot 3 and the associated driveway. S. Makowka votes to approve amendment, J. Worden to approve, T. Smurzynski, opposed, M. Kramer, opposed, A. Frisch and D. Levy for amendment. Amendment fails however at 4 approving and 2 denying. S. Makowka moved denying the project as a whole. D. Levy against denial, A. Frisch against denial, T. Smurzynski, 4 – 2 against denial of project. S. Makowka asked for some intermediate proposal. D. Levy moved approval except for proposed house on lot 3 and instead of that house, carriage house style structure living area under 2000 sf. J. Worden seconded for purposes of discussion. J. Worden suggested motion better stated would be to move to approve project except for construction on lot 3 subject to modification that applicant may come before Commission at later time with much smaller carriage house style structure of 2000sf living area, S. Makowka said his subsequent discussion was clear that something could be built there, he's leary to approve, motion withdrawn, S. Makowka remade modification with clarification towards amendment and moved that the Mt. Gilboa/Crescent Hill Historic District Commission, having fully reviewed the application for a Certificate of Appropriateness before it, including supplemental materials, for the construction of two new structures and the enlargement of the existing structure, finds that the project under consideration, if constructed according to the plans submitted subject to the following modifications, would be in harmony with the historic and architectural values of the site and the District. Modifications include proposed house on lot 3 shall not be constructed, seconded by J. Worden, this is not to preclude proposal of additional structures on lot 3, but would have to come before us on full blown plan subject to our preview. A. Frisch questioned that if this were approved would we be meeting at additional time and S. Makowka said we could amend the motion if people are concerned that final material subjection to be approved by monitor prior to installation, roll call to approved project with modification required. S. Makowka moved approval, J. Worden in favor, T. Smurzynski voted in favor, M. Kramer voted in favor, A. Frisch voted in favor, D. Levy voted approval. New amendment passes unanimously. Monitor appointed B. Cohen and S. Makowka.

S. Makowka noted appreciation of efforts by neighbors and applicants.

S. Makowka moved to adjourn 11:20pm.